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ABSTRACT

A study examined how further education (FE) colleges and Local Education Authority adult education services contribute to neighborhood renewal (NR) in deprived areas and how their strategic role might develop. The National Strategy for Neighborhood Renewal was tackling deprivation in 88 of England's poorest communities by promoting the development of knowledge needed by residents, regeneration practitioners, public service professionals and civil servants. Findings indicated provision of NR training is patchy; providers do not view NR learning as a distinct set of skills and knowledge; and providers are considering changes to infrastructure, programs, and partnership links in light of the national strategy. Good practice was defined in terms of responsiveness to the NR agenda. Results suggested learning provision and its relevance to NR can be viewed as a continuum. Examples of responsive practice were grouped into learning provision for NR; engaging the community in planning and developing learning provision for NR; making partnerships to promote learning for NR; and using resources conducive to good practice. Strategic roles were suggested for providers to play in NR. A statistical review of performance in FE colleges did not suggest substantial problems in performance relating to deprived wards. These four conditions were important to increase NR learning provision: providers with strong management and delivery structures; clear, shared vision and goals at the local level; sustainable funding and other resources; and a common understanding of what is success in learning for NR and how to monitor it.

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Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

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Learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal

Summary report on research for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

Sue Taylor

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Note

This report summarises the main findings and conclusions from a study of how further education (FE) colleges and Local Education Authority (LEA) adult education services contribute to neighbourhood renewal in deprived areas. Topics covered include the policy context, the characteristics and extent of good practice, and the strategic role of learning providers. Useful examples of practice are highlighted. The summary will interest managers responsible for planning learning for neighbourhood renewal, whether in FE colleges, LEAs, regeneration agencies, voluntary organisations or partnerships.

The study was the product of collaboration between the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU). The LSDA is grateful to the NRU for providing the greater part of the funding for the research. The findings and views expressed are those of the LSDA and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NRU.

There are two additional publications related to this study under the title *Learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal*:

- Learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal: Final report to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (available in electronic form only, see www.LSDA.org.uk)
- Learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal: A policy review (available in electronic form and hard copy).

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Introduction

This report summarises the main findings and conclusions from a study of adult learning and neighbourhood renewal, conducted by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) in partnership with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU), between July 2002 and March 2003.

The broad aims of the study were to examine how further education (FE) colleges and Local Education Authority (LEA) adult education services contribute to neighbourhood renewal in deprived areas, and to consider how their strategic role might develop. The results of the research were expected to:

- raise the profile of this work among learning providers and partner organisations
- inform the NRU
- encourage more widespread adoption of responsive approaches to learning for neighbourhood renewal
- help learning providers develop a well-defined strategic role in this field.

The study comprised six elements:

- a policy review
- a questionnaire survey of 580 FE colleges and LEA adult learning services, resulting in 271 responses
- case studies of 10 learning providers
- two 'small area' studies
- a statistical review
- a review of available data sources and other evidence to assess how providers are performing in deprived areas, including their contribution to learning for neighbourhood renewal.

Policy context

The government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is a long-term (10–20 year) project designed to tackle deprivation in England's poorest communities (Social Exclusion Unit 2001). Targeted on the 88 local authorities with the highest concentrations of deprived areas, NRU programmes aim to develop community-based solutions in five key problem areas: housing, health, educational attainment, unemployment and crime. Two broader issues are also addressed: how to revive local economies and how to improve overall quality of life. The quality of local public services is a central concern.

Part of the NRU's strategy is a programme, detailed in *The learning curve* (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2002b) to promote the development of the skills and knowledge required for neighbourhood renewal. The programme focuses in particular on the specific skills and knowledge needed by residents,

regeneration practitioners, public service professionals and civil servants, to tackle the key problem areas referred to above.

The knowledge and skills viewed as necessary for successful neighbourhood renewal can be summarised as:

- knowledge about 'what works' in solving problems in housing, education, unemployment, crime and health
- skills in applying knowledge (analytical and problem-solving skills)
- organisational skills (eg project management, finance and budgeting)
- interpersonal skills (eg community leadership, conflict resolution, partnership working)
- entrepreneurial skills (eg managing risk)
- reflective skills (eg evaluating success, learning from failure).

The policy framework for post-16 learning and skills introduced in 2001 has the potential to be very helpful to the development of learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal. For example, local planning and funding mechanisms help sharpen the focus on regeneration and neighbourhood renewal and on investing in provision that meets identified learner, community and employer needs. Moreover, the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) policies and processes cover cross-cutting issues such as regeneration, and partnership working – vital to neighbourhood renewal – is viewed as essential to the achievement of many post-16 policy goals.

There are, however, constraints. Neighbourhood renewal is but one of many issues within the LSC's span of control. The LSC and learning providers are already subject to wide-ranging targets relating to participation, attainment and skills acquisition for young people and adults. The recognition of a specific skill and knowledge 'set' for neighbourhood renewal work is a relatively new phenomenon and key stakeholders in the learning and skills sector may not yet be fully aware of its importance and their potential role in delivering it.

Encouragement from the NRU and the LSC will therefore be needed if this type of learning provision is to receive due attention. The relative immaturity of the post-16 strategic planning, funding and quality arrangements may offer scope for the NRU to work with the LSC as it shapes the detail of these policies and processes. This would help ensure that learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal are given adequate regard. The final report to the NRU (see 'Note' at the front of this summary) suggests policy 'levers' that might be used to encourage learning providers to extend or strengthen their neighbourhood renewal work.

Key findings

The findings indicate that:

- the NRU skills and knowledge strategy is not yet widely understood in the sector and the provision of specific training for neighbourhood renewal is patchy
- learning providers tend to interpret neighbourhood renewal learning as synonymous with widening participation activity, rather than as a distinctive set of skills and knowledge
- in spite of the finding that specific training for neighbourhood renewal is not widespread, there is evidence of valuable provision, directly or indirectly related to neighbourhood renewal, that offers models for wider use. This includes courses that develop skills for community working and skills for local leadership, as well as a wide range of community involvement, outreach and partnership activity that serves neighbourhood renewal goals
- there are signs that providers are now considering changes to their infrastructure, programmes and partnership links in the light of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

Characteristics of good practice

For this study, we defined 'good practice' in terms of *responsiveness* to the neighbourhood renewal agenda. We concluded that four dimensions of practice are particularly important to successful neighbourhood renewal learning.

- Offering effective learning provision for neighbourhood renewal. This means provision that is either specifically designed to increase the capacity for neighbourhood renewal work among local people and local organisations, or contributes indirectly to this end.

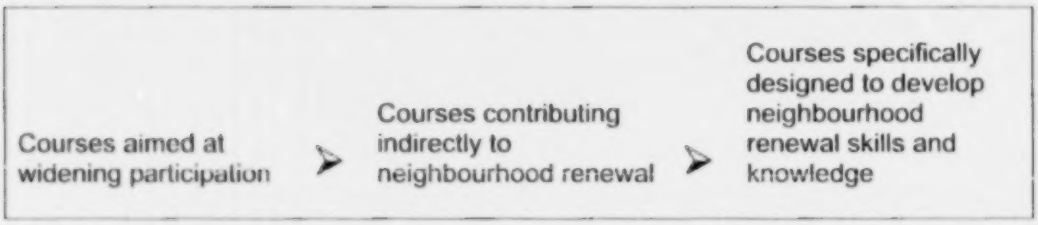
- Engaging the community in planning and developing learning provision for neighbourhood renewal. This means enabling residents, regeneration practitioners and professionals to play an active part in planning and developing programmes to meet their needs.

- Working in and developing partnerships to promote learning for neighbourhood renewal. This means effective working with partnerships such as local strategic partnerships, learning partnerships and New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships, and developing innovative approaches to working with local residents, regeneration practitioners and other stakeholders.

- Using resources that are conducive to good practice. This means not only effective use of available income streams but also attracting staff with the necessary skills and attributes to engage with local communities, and drawing on the knowledge and skills present in the community.

A continuum of learning provision

The evidence from our study suggests that widening participation and specific skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal are not watertight categories of provision. Rather, learning provision and its relevance to neighbourhood renewal can be viewed as a continuum:


Courses aimed at widening participation
Courses contributing indirectly to neighbourhood renewal
Courses specifically designed to develop neighbourhood renewal skills and knowledge

At one extreme are providers' efforts to widen participation in learning (eg removing barriers and/or actively promoting engagement) and to raise skill levels in poor communities. At the other are courses specifically designed to equip residents, professionals and regeneration practitioners with skills and knowledge to improve conditions and tackle problems of crime, poor health, and so on. Part way along the continuum is provision that widens participation and raises skill levels but also sets out to help communities address the problems they face. This is achieved by building in progression routes to further training and jobs that are relevant to local neighbourhood renewal goals, and/or by improving the skills of people already in community development posts. Learning provision covering the full extent of the continuum is essential for successful neighbourhood renewal.

Examples of responsive practice

Learning provision for neighbourhood renewal

Bristol Community Education: 'Working in the Community' course for women. Also, an accredited course, 'Move into Public Life', to encourage local people to consider roles such as those of school governor, local councillor or advocate.

Medway Adult and Community Learning: Community Leadership programme (providing qualifications from basic skills level up to Masters degree), and Basic Skills for Citizenship programme (from entry level to Level 3) for active volunteers in community groups.

North Warwickshire and Hinckley College: foundation degree in 'Community Development and Enterprise' in association with Warwick University. Learners on the course are active in the community or are professionals responsible for community provision.

Northern College: a pilot course for 'Neighbourhood Animateurs', as well as courses for 'Community Health Animateurs' funded by the Health Action Zone. The 'animateur' courses equip participants with skills and knowledge to become community activists, able to identify community needs and develop and manage community-led activities.

Tower Hamlets College: 'Working in Your Community', a programme specifically designed for community capacity building. Aimed at workers and volunteers, it enables students to identify and build on the skills, resources and knowledge needed in their work. Also, focused 'civic involvement' courses, such as 'Becoming a Board Member' for tenants of Registered Social Landlords and 'Be a School Governor' for Bengali and Somali parents.

Post-16 citizenship programmes for young people/young adults: for example, work involving colleges and other partners in Oldham (developed in the aftermath of riots in the town in 2001) to empower young adults and nurture a critical understanding of rights and responsibilities, showing how working together can achieve change.

Engaging the community in planning and developing learning provision for neighbourhood renewal

Burnley College has developed an outreach approach focused on finding suitable funding, which it then channels to community groups, tenants' groups and ethnic minority groups. These groups use the funds to deliver their own agenda but with monitoring by joint steering groups. Communities thus have ownership of the ideas and activities. The work is supported by three full-time Community Learning Representatives (CLRs) – local residents recruited by the college and based in community organisations in selected neighbourhoods.

Islington LEA's Lifelong Learning Service used the knowledge and expertise of people from local disadvantaged communities in drawing up its Adult Learning Plan. A Citizen's Conference was devised and resourced from the DfES Lifelong Learning Standards Fund. Delegates were recruited from socio-economic groups that are less likely to participate in learning, but included a balance of people who had not been involved in learning since leaving school and those who had. 'Witnesses' from similar social backgrounds across the country also took part. The aim was to identify what factors had helped people transcend barriers to learning. The conference findings were presented to senior officers and politicians, and conference participants were engaged in implementing them.

Partnerships to promote learning for neighbourhood renewal

Birmingham and Solihull LSC is adopting a system of tripartite agreements or licensing arrangements. This involves the licensing of franchised provision by colleges to voluntary and community organisations, based on an agreement between the college, the voluntary organisation and the local LSC. The aim is to ensure fair funding for the voluntary organisation, as well as putting in place a development programme to enable it to become a direct provider should it wish to do so.

Northern College is involved in creating a sub-regional Academy for Community Leadership, to consist of a loose consortium of training providers and a central directorate. The directorate's role will be to act as an enabling, commissioning body. In the longer term the academy will become an independent, community-owned organisation.

Using resources that are conducive to good practice

Bristol Community Education delivers a Positive Action Tutor Training programme, targeting under-represented communities, offering additional support so that new tutors can join the service and providing positive role models for the targeted communities.

Islington LEA is piloting a mentoring service under the title 'Handholders' – a service for people who want someone to support them when they begin new learning or progress to a new course. Mentors, who are themselves recent new adult learners, receive training for the work.

South Birmingham College has established a dedicated Community Development Unit able to draw in relevant local expertise and skills and combine these with the college's specialist expertise (eg in curriculum and programme development). The college's Parent Partnership Project, in conjunction with the LEA, recruits local women/mothers to work in local schools to identify the learning needs of parents. Women working as 'parent partners' in deprived neighbourhoods have progressed to permanent posts.

Tower Hamlets College develops members of the local community to become tutors and trainers on its programmes. It uses dedicated staff with youth and community education backgrounds to build learning provision and develop trainees to become 'trainers of the future'.

Defining a clear strategic role

We suggest five strategic roles that learning providers can play in neighbourhood renewal.

Gateway to learning
Courses up to Level 2, including first rung, pre-entry and entry level courses; skills for employability and social inclusion. These provide the 'hook' for deeper engagement in learning, and essential building-blocks for more specific neighbourhood renewal learning.

Skills for economic competitiveness
Provision at Level 3 and above to equip local people with skills and qualifications to become employed or work more productively, with benefits for inward investment.

Specific skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal
Courses to meet the requirements set out in *The learning curve*, to develop and support residents, regeneration practitioners, professionals and civil servants working in deprived areas.

Strategic partner
Working with other organisations to build community trust and cohesion, brokering consensus, and supporting smaller learning providers via funding and quality assurance arrangements.

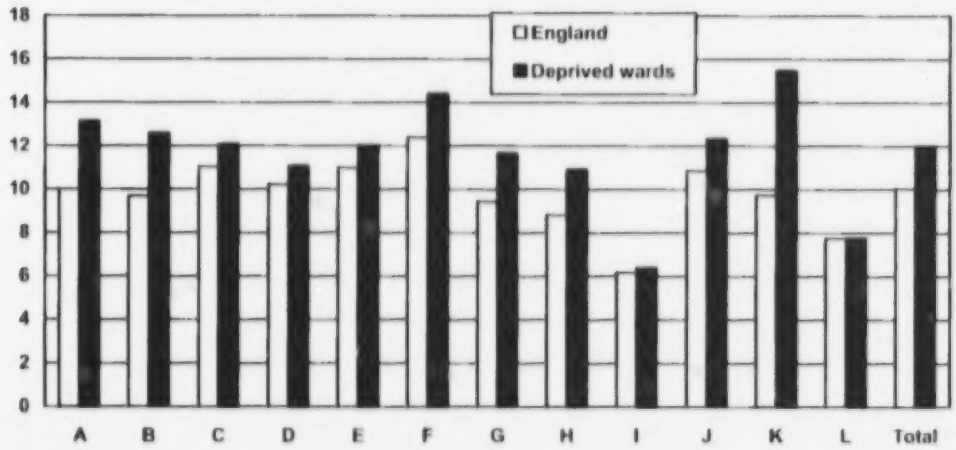
Community empowerment
Developing and supporting local learning communities and assisting individuals and groups to play an active role in local affairs.

Reviewing performance

In view of the NRU's objective to improve the quality of public services in deprived areas, a statistical review of performance in FE colleges (and to a lesser extent in LEA adult education services) in these areas was conducted.[1] For this we used geo-demographic analysis (supported by MOSAIC software) to enable comparison between different areas on a like-with-like basis.

The overall picture does not suggest substantial problems in performance relating to the deprived wards. In particular, evidence on participation by learners in the learning and skills sector is encouraging, as shown in the figure below. The results show a significantly higher rate for populations from deprived wards compared with the national average. In colleges, the retention rate for learners from the deprived wards is slightly below the national figure and achievement is 5% below. However, these disparities do not suggest substantial problems overall.

Figure 1: College sector participation rates (percentages) by MOSAIC groups A–L, England and deprived wards



Key to MOSAIC postcode groups

A High income families
B Suburban semis
C Blue collar owners
D Low rise council housing
E Council flats
F Victorian low status
G Town houses and flats
H Younger singles
I Older households
J Younger households
K Country dwellers
L Institutional areas

[1] The final report to the NRU includes approximate estimates of participation rates for adult and community learning and other learning and skills sectors. Statistics on retention and achievement in these sectors are not yet available on the same basis as for the college sector. Reliable comparisons cannot therefore be made, as yet, across the learning and skills sector as a whole.

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Building on the statistical review, the study considered measures that might assist the NRU, learning providers and other agencies such as local LSCs to assess performance in deprived areas in the future. Statistics on participation, retention and achievement are recommended as the most robust sources, concentrating mainly on existing data sources familiar to college sector providers (see footnote 1). This data can be analysed to help judge the quality of post-16 education services in deprived areas, for example in attracting learners, motivating learners to complete courses, and enabling them to achieve qualification goals.

Additional benchmarks may be helpful. A strong message emerging from our case studies of learning providers was that current measures of success are not always helpful. The perceived lack of consistency between different agencies (including funding bodies) in the fields of learning and skills and regeneration as to quality requirements and priorities is seen as a potential barrier to progress. Moreover, success measures tend to relate primarily to inputs and outputs, rather than to the impact of learning provision on longer-term changes in communities.

We therefore suggest that it may be useful to develop qualitative benchmarks to assess progress against areas of good practice identified in this research. These areas would include the availability of suitable programmes and courses, how providers engage the community in planning and developing learning provision, and how providers work with partnerships to promote learning provision for neighbourhood renewal.

Such benchmarks could help to make neighbourhood renewal activity a more explicit component in quality and inspection regimes. This would enable clearer judgements to be made about the adequacy and quality of provision and practice, and about comparative performance across the sector. In particular, such measures could be beneficial in:

- LSC Strategic Area Reviews
- LSC provider reviews
- provider self-assessment and development planning
- Ofsted and Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspections of individual providers
- area inspections and post-area-inspection planning.

What would increase or improve learning provision for neighbourhood renewal?

We conclude that, as the implications of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and *The learning curve* become more widely understood in the learning and skills sector, there is potential for individual learning providers to increase their contribution to this agenda, where this activity is consistent with their mission and strengths.

Specific training for neighbourhood renewal may not be an appropriate role for all providers in deprived areas. However, those with a mission to widen participation and a tradition of being involved in local social and economic regeneration may wish to extend or strengthen their commitment to neighbourhood renewal.

For this to happen, four conditions seem important:

- providers with strong management and delivery structures, who know their communities well and have excellent partnership links with local community agencies and other stakeholders
- clear and shared vision and goals at local level
- sustainable funding and other resources (particularly staffing and facilities)
- a common understanding of what constitutes success and impact in learning for neighbourhood renewal, and robust ways to monitor this.

Following *Success for all* (DfES 2002). providers are expected to review and develop their missions, in consultation with their local LSCs. This may offer an opportunity to identify 'untapped' potential for neighbourhood renewal learning in existing provision and practice, and to embed a commitment to stronger partnership with other providers to meet neighbourhood renewal goals.

Further reading

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Useful websites

Campaign for Learning
www.campaignforlearning.org.uk

Community Development Foundation
www.cdf.org.uk

Community Education Development Centre
www.cedc.org.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
www.jrf.org.uk

Learning and Skills Council
www.lsc.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Development Agency
www.LSDA.org.uk

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
www.niace.gov.uk

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
www.odpm.gov.uk

Regen.net: 'the information network for regeneration partnerships'. A gateway to sources of information on regeneration and a means of sharing experience and good practice
www.regen.net

Renewal.net: an online guide to 'what works' in neighbourhood renewal
www.renewal.net

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